

South Downtown Public Comments
August 1, 2005
From Chris Koh

Susan, Gary,
thought I would recap a few comments I made, some discussion a few of us had during break, and a few new ideas.

South of Dearborn- owned by a handful of landlords including the City which w/ exception of INS are not historic buildings, thereby making this section the easiest to significantly impact. It is the closest to the stadiums (which already have a good deal of parking) and could become a pre and post game entertainment mecca for events, a Park, family functions, etc.

Japantown is hilly which doesn't work well with retail, but with its spectacular views is ripe for housing. Unlike South Dearborn, this area is close enough to downtown, where most people would walk it on a Spring/Summer day and bus it when raining to go to work.

Chinatown- Supply & Demand dictates development and the success of a business. When we first contemplated a vegetarian restaurant, a couple of the restaurant owners warned us that a good deal of them 20% were up for sale. We also tried to attract a major grocer to Jackson and or Dearborn Street and were told that the neighborhood would not support it. (Buying habits and \$ spent). Per the census data in the binder, the income levels are not there to support even the existing businesses and that's why more have not come to even redevelop non historic sites.

Non-profit organizations are the only ones tackling the projects, which in most instances are the remodels of historic properties. Remodeling always cost more than new construction (hardware you can't find at Home Depot) and comes with restrictions of saving walls (which means in SRO rooms, they become harder to convert to larger conventional 1 and 2 BDRM apartments or 3-4 BDRM family style units). This also precludes installing parking (a necessary evil of market type housing, certainly for families). So, how do non-profits improve the cause to increase income levels and spending habits here?

Culture and race of existing properties has a significant impact. Asians enjoy the tangibles of real estate and having tight knit families, pass it amongst the generations. They also don't want to be told what colors their buildings can be painted, sign permission or the inefficient windows must be repaired. Instead they board them up the historic buildings, leaving the upper floors abandoned. Race is a decisive factor in even dropping Chinatown out of the ID name.

Little Saigon- Visiting this past weekend, parking again is exacerbated by the use of parking spots for fork lifts and fruit stands and poses safety problems with pedestrians and drivers along 12th Ave or Jackson. We have a double standard with strong zoning/historic preservation in Pioneer Square/Chinatown and a lack of any regulation here.

This neighborhood and Airport Way are not pedestrian friendly, due to the number of vehicles that need to cross through the major arterials and therefore not ideal for more housing.

Public parking garages (like in Portland) in Little Saigon, and Chinatown would draw more people in who have the income levels to spend. Drivers coming to both eat and then shop don't want to have to get back into their vehicle and move one block as you would in downtown Bellevue (Mall excluded).

With our mostly wet weather, people will don their Gore-Tex and walk if the distances are short enough and the businesses and services close enough. Pioneer Square, Japan town and parts of Chinatown are close enough to the core downtown for this to happen. Leave your car in these three locations, walk to work and afterwards hit South Dearborn for pregame activities before hitting a ball game.

The City is extraordinarily concerned about our environment with incentives to save energy, conserve water, drive less and walk or use public transit, while wanting to salvage and make structurally safe older buildings. Complicated ideas like tax credits, working with multiple government agencies to audit rent levels, and keeping a building historic with Asian character, subject to a Board have not generated the Bang that was anticipated.

Waiving DPD permit fees for the upgrade of a vacant building may generate interest. (T.I. work from an existing use would be excluded). City Light would waive new hook-up fees for service (\$100,000 vault where putting meters for separate heaters in each dwelling unit). Seattle Water would waive the exorbitant 4" water meter fee for a fire sprinkler system. In both instances the utilities charge monthly service fees even though there was no consumption. Seatran could waive street use or improvement fees.

Thanks Chris Koh
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